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#79001-a

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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19 January 1954

SUBJECT: DRAFT SPECIAL BOARD ESTIMATE: PROBABLE EUROPEAN  
REACTIONS TO US PROPOSALS REGARDING BERLIN

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the reactions of the UK, France, and West Germany to a US proposal for the prompt use of forceful measures in the event of a Soviet blockade or action tantamount to a blockade of Berlin.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. That Soviet or East German measures have reached a point threatening the access to Berlin of the Western Allies, West Germany, or both.
2. That the Western Allies have held the Soviets responsible for these measures, and have affirmed their right and intent to maintain their positions in Berlin and unrestricted access thereto, and their objection to the Soviet or East German measures, which have nonetheless been continued or increased.
3. That the US and the Western Allies have not instituted an airlift to supply Berlin, (other than for purposes such as personnel transfer, special needs, etc.).
4. That, by virtue of its stockpile, Berlin is not in physical distress or in prospect of being so within a period of 3 to 6 months.

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5. That the US proposal calls for the use of "limited military force, initially to the extent necessary to determine Soviet intentions (e.g., by armed convoy under orders not to shoot except in self-defense)," thereafter to attempt to reopen access to Berlin (e.g., by armed convoy under orders to shoot if prevented from going through). In either case the US would make clear to its allies its belief that Berlin is not militarily defensible and that if determined Soviet armed opposition should develop when US units attempt to force their way into or out of Berlin, no additional forces would be committed, but resort would have to be made to general war.

6. That the US would propose, or would already have initiated, measures to step up US readiness for war.

#### DISCUSSION

7. The British, French, and West Germans would almost certainly not regard a new blockade of Berlin as equivalent to a deliberate initiation of general war by the USSR. They would, therefore, insist that every effort be made to achieve an end of the blockade without resorting to acts which might result in general war even though not intended to have such a result. They would expect these efforts to be continued over a considerable time, and would wish to leave ways open to the USSR to retreat from its position without unacceptable loss of prestige. As a last resort, these governments might reluctantly consent to a test of the blockade by an armed convoy under orders not to fire except in self-defense.

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8. We do not believe that the British, French, or West Germans would be willing to run grave risk of precipitating World War III solely in order to preserve the Western position in Berlin, when it had not been put in jeopardy by armed attack. The chances are, therefore, that none of these governments would support the US in the use of forceful means to break the blockade. They would fear that World War III might ensue, even though neither the US nor the USSR desired it.

9. On the other hand, the Western powers might become convinced in the course of negotiations that the USSR, pursuant to a long-term plan of aggression, had determined to subject the Western powers to an important defeat, even at grave risk of precipitating World War III. If thus convinced, we believe that the UK and probably West Germany would conclude that the issue had best be faced. They might therefore support the US in sending an armed convoy with orders to force their way through if opposed. We doubt that the French government would agree.

10. If the US should ignore allied opposition to its proposals and general war should result from US action, a large bloc of official and popular European opinion would hold that the war could

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have been avoided and would blame US impulsiveness rather than Soviet aggressiveness for its initiation. Neutralist sentiment would spread broadly. Nevertheless, the British, French, and West German governments would probably desire to adhere to the Western coalition under US leadership. However, in the face of widespread apathy and doubt they might be easy victims to atomic blackmail by the USSR.

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